

31 January 2001

AI Index EUR 21/001/2001 - News Service Nr. 19

France: Government must apply international standards to Action Directe four

"There is evidence that the treatment of the Action Directe prisoners has fallen short of international standards," Amnesty International said today. "The French government simply must take steps to rectify this immediately."

Joëlle Aubron, Nathalie Ménigon, Jean-Marc Rouillan and Georges Cipriani were arrested in February 1987 and sentenced in 1994 to multiple terms of life imprisonment for politically-motivated acts of violence, including murder. For most of the 14 years they have spent in prison they have been held under varying degrees of solitary confinement and isolation. The reported breakdown in the physical and mental health of at least two of them is widely attributed to the years of isolation to which they have been subjected.

Joëlle Aubron and Nathalie Ménigon were originally held under a specially restrictive high security category, but were transferred in 1999 to a prison where conditions were expected to be normalised. However, their means of social communication, correspondence and visits have reportedly remained subject to special restrictions and they are not able to visit the common areas of the prison.

Nathalie Ménigon married Jean-Marc Rouillan in 1999, but has been unable to see him. She is suffering from serious cardio-vascular problems and depression, and is reported to have recently had two heart attacks. She is also reported to be paralysed on her left side and to be suffering from speech problems. Georges Cipriani, held at Ensisheim (Haut-Rhin) and for a time at a psychiatric hospital, is reported to have gradually

lost his sanity and to no longer be aware that he is being held in prison at all. Prison guards have expressed concern about his condition.

Jean-Marc Rouillan, held at Lannemezan prison, and Joëlle Aubron have been on hunger strike since early January to draw attention in particular to the plight of Georges Cipriani and Nathalie Ménigon.

Amnesty International has a longstanding concern about the conditions of detention and imprisonment of the four members of *Action Directe*. The human rights organization believes that prolonged isolation can have a detrimental effect on the physical and mental health of prisoners and may in some circumstances amount to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment. In 1988 Amnesty International wrote to the Justice Minister to seek clarification about the conditions under which the four detainees were held, after receiving reports that they had been placed in prolonged periods of isolation. In 1998 Amnesty International again sought clarification from the Justice Minister after receiving reports that, 12 years after their arrest and four years after conviction, they were still being subjected to strict isolation and to severe restrictions on their correspondence and visits, and that some measures, such as the rejection of a request from Nathalie Ménigon to allow a kitten into her cell, seemed purely punitive.

Amnesty International has never received a reply to this letter.

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